

YOUNG CENTER *News*

THE YOUNG CENTER FOR
ANABAPTIST AND PIETIST STUDIES
AT ELIZABETHTOWN COLLEGE



From China to the Young Center: International scholars find a global home for anabaptist research

The Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies is delighted to welcome researchers from around the world whose work is enriched by its internationally recognized collections, archives, and scholarly community. This summer, two visiting scholars from China—Bao Xiaowan (Jessica), pictured below, and Pan Yaping (Penny), pictured right—joined that global network, bringing with them distinct research interests and a shared appreciation for the unique resources available at Elizabethtown College.

Although their academic projects differ, both scholars traveled thousands of miles for the same reason: they recognized that the Young Center offers opportunities for research and collaboration that cannot be replicated elsewhere.

For Jessica, whose research focuses on the Church of the Brethren's China Mission, the journey began with a chance discovery. While researching the mission about a year and a half ago, she came across a 2016 issue of *Young Center News* describing Professors Jeff Bach and David Kenly's research trip to Shanxi, China. That article introduced her to the Young Center and its work.



Penny became familiar with the Young Center during her doctoral research on Amish society and technology. In the field of Amish

studies, she explained, the Young Center is internationally recognized as one of the world's leading research institutions. As she developed her current postdoctoral project examining the relationships among Amish technology, society, agriculture, and the environment, she knew that visiting the Center would be invaluable.

Jessica was drawn to the Hess Archives because of its exceptional collection related to the Brethren mission in China. "The Hess Archive's collection on the Church of the Brethren China Mission drew me here," she said. She was especially grateful for the opportunity to work with Professor Jeff Bach, whose scholarship has long informed her own research. She also expressed deep appreciation for Director Steve Nolt, archivist Dr. Rachel Grove Rohrbaugh[SN1.1], and the entire Young Center staff for their generosity, encouragement, and professional assistance throughout her stay.

Among the archival collections that proved especially valuable were the Wampler and Sollenberger family papers. These primary sources will directly support Jessica's ongoing research and future publications on the Church of the Brethren's work in China.

Penny likewise found the Center's collections indispensable. Because many important Amish periodicals, photographs, correspondence, agricultural materials, and other primary sources are preserved at the Young Center and Hess Archives, she was able to consult materials that would have been extremely difficult to access from China.

While the archival collections brought both scholars to Elizabethtown, they agreed

that the experience extended well beyond the reading room.

For Penny, one of the greatest advantages of conducting research in Pennsylvania was the opportunity to connect historical sources with lived experience. Her research explores how Amish communities balance technology, agriculture, environmental stewardship, and religious values.

"It was very important for me to come to Elizabethtown in person," she explained. "Even small details—landscapes, transportation, farming methods, markets, sounds, and rhythms of daily life—are meaningful for understanding Amish society." During her fellowship, Penny visited Amish farms and equipment manufacturers and met Amish farmers for the first time. These experiences added an important dimension to her research by allowing her to observe firsthand the communities she has studied for years.

Jessica also emphasized the importance of conducting research in person. Working directly with original archival materials deepened her understanding of the Church of the Brethren as one of the historic peace churches. It strengthened her interest in the experiences of conscientious objectors.

(continued on page 2)





From the Director

This year marks the Young Center's fortieth anniversary!

In 1986, Elizabethtown College President Gerhard Spiegler announced the establishment of a study center to promote scholarly research and public interpretation of the Anabaptist and Pietist traditions that shaped the school's Church of the Brethren founders.

John A. Hostetler, an expert on Amish and Hutterite societies from Temple University, became the Center's inaugural director. Scholars Donald B. Kraybill and Donald and Hedda Durnbaugh played key roles in the Center's launch and flourishing. The generosity of Dr. Galen Young, a Philadelphia-area surgeon, college trustee, and Church of the Brethren lay minister, saw the construction of a home for the newly named Young Center in 1989.

Throughout the year, vital support from the College's administration and the backing of dedicated donors have helped the Young Center achieve international recognition, match a National Endowment for the Humanities challenge grant, host lectures and conferences, provide research opportunities for students, and expand our facilities.

As described in this issue of the newsletter, the Center's work remains as vigorous as ever. Visiting fellows from around the world come here seeking resources and expertise, and make use of the unique collections in the Hess Archives. This fall, our Snowden Fellow, Mark Dewalt, will research and present on Amish schooling. Emmy Maendel and Jonathan Seiling, recipients of this year's Dale W. Brown Book Award, will share their work on Jakob Hutter, a sixteenth-century communitarian Reformer, and theologian Drew Hart will explain why today's world needs to reconsider the witness of both Anabaptism and the Black Church. At season's end, the Young Center's director emeritus, Jeff Bach, will lead a Pietist-inspired Advent service of word and music.

Please join us as we celebrate this milestone and build on four decades of achievement!

Steve Nolt
Director

From China to the Young Center *Continued...*

Beyond the research itself, she treasured the friendships she formed during her time at the Young Center.

"Working with the Young Center staff and researchers is a blessing in my life," Jessica said. "It is a precious memory that I will hold dear to my heart for the rest of my life."

Jessica is currently completing a Chinese-language monograph on the Church of the Brethren China Mission. She has recently revised her Chinese translation of missionary Ernest Wampler's memoir *China Suffers*. Penny plans to publish her research in both Chinese and English, helping introduce more readers and scholars in China to Amish society and the broader Anabaptist tradition. Both scholars also hope their experiences will encourage greater academic collaboration between Chinese researchers and the Young Center. Jessica described the Center as "the No. 1 Anabaptist and Pietist research center throughout the world."

Researchers travel from around the world not simply because of the collections housed in the Hess Archives, but because the Center

offers something equally valuable: opportunities to collaborate with leading scholars, learn from dedicated staff, engage with local communities, and build lasting professional relationships.

For Jessica, one moment stood out above all others: meeting Professor Jeff Bach after years of benefiting from his scholarship. "I'm greatly honored to be part of an international community of researchers at the Young Center," she said. "Meeting Professor Jeff Bach in person is just like a dream come true." Penny reflected that traveling halfway around the world had given her "experiences and perspectives that would have been impossible to gain elsewhere."

Their stories are reminders of just how far the Young Center's influence reaches. By welcoming global scholars, preserving world-class collections, and fostering meaningful academic exchange, the Center continues to advance its mission of supporting research, preserving history, and building connections that span cultures, disciplines, and continents.

Mark Dewalt named Snowden Fellow for fall 2026

Mark W. Dewalt, a professor emeritus at Winthrop University, has been named the Snowden Fellow for fall 2026. Dewalt has studied Amish and Old Order Mennonite schooling and culture for more than 50 years. He published his first book, *Amish Education in the United States and Canada*, in 2006. His most recent publications include "The Extant and Nature of Motor Vehicle and Buggy Crashes" and "Prevalence of Accidents in Smaller Amish Settlements: 2015–2022," both co-authored with Rachel Stein; and "The Growth of Old Order Mennonite Schools" and "Amish Mortality Rates in the Twenty-First Century." Currently, he is conducting research on mortality and accident rates among the Amish, and while at the Young Center, he will continue this research.

Dewalt's main objectives to coming to the Young Center "are two-fold: first, to add vital information to my data base on Amish schools which will include data from settlements not included in the [Edwin] Lambright [school directories] and to write a manuscript

documenting the growth of Amish schools in the United States and Canada." He will be searching for data to "determine the number of schools and teachers serving Amish schools as of the 2024–2025 school year." Then he will compare this data "with previously collected data on Amish schools to provide a detailed picture of the growth rate and current make-up of Amish schools."

There is limited data available on today's Plain schools. Pathway Publishers began gathering information on Amish and Old Order Mennonite Schools in the 1960s, but stopped doing so in the mid-2000s due to the complexity of the task. Edwin Lambright picked up the work Pathway had been doing and wrote several booklets on the subject in the early 2020s. However, many settlements did not report school data to him. Dewalt hopes to fill those gaps by using the library holdings at the Young Center and the Muddy Creek Farm Library. "Specifically, I will use *The Diary*, *The Budget*, *Die Botshaft*, and various settlement directories to determine the number of schools and teachers serving Amish schools as of the 2024–2025 school year."

Mark Dewalt will present a lecture about his work at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, November 17, in the Bucher Meetinghouse.



Exploring anabaptism for a global church

On April 30, the Young Center hosted a day-long seminar examining Anabaptist history, missiology, and the global church, led by Dr. Nelson Okanya, Director of Commissions for Mennonite World Conference, who served as a Visiting Fellow last spring. Eighteen participants engaged in spirited conversation and offered feedback on a working paper that Okanya wrote while in residence at the Young Center. Here Linford Stutzman, Harrisonburg, Va.; Bruce Yoder, Listowel, Ont.; Bruce Campbell-Janz, Lancaster, Pa.; and Lois Y. Barrett, Wichita, Kans., discuss the implications of Anabaptism for a missional church.



Jakob Hutter: His Life and Letters

2026 DALE W. BROWN BOOK AWARD WINNER

The Young Center is pleased to announce that *Jakob Hutter: His Life and Letters*, edited by Emmy Barth Maendel and Jonathan Seiling, has been selected as the recipient of the 2026 Dale W. Brown Book Award.

This volume brings together Jakob Hutter's surviving letters along with a wide range of related historical documents, all carefully annotated and newly translated from original manuscript sources. It opens with a substantial biographical study of Hutter and his wife, Katharina, drawing on recent archival discoveries to place their lives within the broader story of the Hutterite movement, a communal Anabaptist tradition that emerged during the Radical Reformation in sixteenth-century Tyrol and Moravia.

The collection begins with Hutter's eight extant letters, written to encourage, instruct, and strengthen congregations facing persecution. These letters have been translated

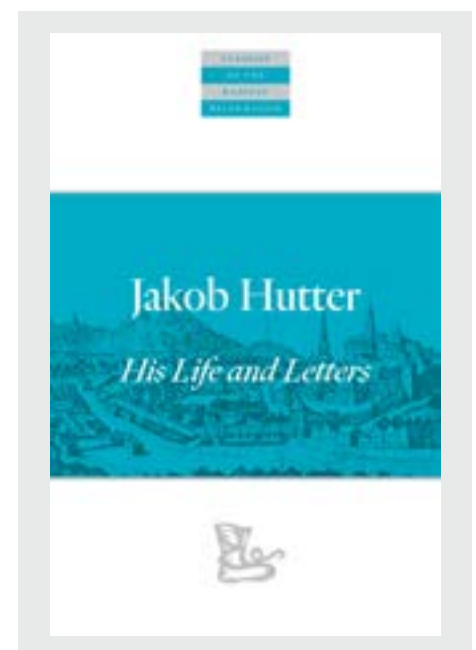
ment interrogation records that shed light on Hutter's missionary efforts and the challenges faced by Anabaptist communities.

The book also includes writings by Hutter's contemporaries and early followers that reflect his influence on the movement, as well as correspondence between government officials concerned with suppressing Anabaptism. Together, these documents provide perspectives from both supporters and opponents, offering a fuller understanding of Hutter's role, the communities he served, and the legacy he left behind. The final chapter presents additional sources on his death and ongoing impact, both within the Hutterite tradition and beyond.

In *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, Dr. Robert J. Suderman praised the book as "a sobering and humbling reminder" of the experiences of a largely blue-collar community. He further noted that the work demonstrates "how gripping simple truth can be in the lives of folks suffering under the oppression of political, social, and religious systems."

Co-editors Emmy Barth Maendel and Jonathan Seiling will give two guest lec-

tures on Jakob Hutter on Thursday, October 29th, 2026. The first lecture, titled "Chasing the Hutterites through the Hills: Sources and Translation," will be held at 3 p.m. The second lecture, "Leader in a Turbulent Time: Hutter's Enduring Legacy," will be held at 7 p.m. Both lectures will be held in the Bucher Meetinghouse. Come to learn more about this incredible leader of the Hutterite movement.



Brethren in China is the focus of the current exhibit

The exhibit space in the Young Center's lobby is featuring items from the Hess Archives and Special Collections related to the Church of the Brethren's missions work to China.

The Church of the Brethren first sent missionaries to China in 1908. Two years later, they established a mission station in Pingding, Shanxi Province. Brethren missionaries engaged in agricultural, medical, educational, and evangelistic work in China for decades, establishing a local church despite significant hardships, including famine, plague, local warlord violence, and Japanese occupation. The mission ended with the advent of Communist rule in the early 1950s.

The exhibit features artifacts related to the Brethren movement in China. Along with several photos, the display shows an old family Bible that had been damaged from shrapnel, a sword used to kill Christians, and a letter detailing what life was like after rescue from a Japanese concentration camp.



Drew Hart to speak

Rev. Dr. Drew G. I. Hart is an Associate Professor of Theology at Messiah University, where since 2021, he has directed the *Thriving Together: Congregations for Racial Justice* program in central Pennsylvania. A public theologian and practitioner in social change with ten years of pastoral ministry experience, his research and scholarship sit



at the intersection of Black liberation theology, Anabaptism, anti-Christendom, and decolonial ecclesiology and ethics.

He is the author of *Trouble I've Seen: Changing the Way the Church Views Racism* (2016) and

Who Will Be A Witness? Igniting Activism for God's Justice, Love, and Deliverance (2020). He also co-edited and contributed to *Reparations and the Theological Disciplines: Prophetic Voices for Remembrance, Reckoning, and Repair* (November 2023). His newest book is *Making It Plain: Why We Need Anabaptism and the Black Church*, which was released on September 2, 2025.

In recognition of his work for racial justice, he has received the bcmPEACE Peacemaker Award (2017), the W.E.B. Du Bois Award (2019), the Harambee Award (2023), and the Revelation 7:9 Award (2025). Hart writes regularly on his Substack, *Hart & Soul*, and also co-hosts the *Inverse Podcast* alongside Australian pastor and peace activist Jarrod McKenna.

New research and editorial associate

The Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies is pleased to welcome Abigail Henson as its new editor. Abigail brings a strong background in writing, editing, and publishing, along with a deep appreciation for the power of thoughtful communication and storytelling.

Abigail holds a Bachelor of Arts in English and a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing with a concentration in fiction. She spent more than three years as an editor at Sunbury Press, where she edited over 40 books across

a variety of genres. She also works as a freelance editor, partnering with authors to refine their manuscripts and bring their ideas to life with clarity and precision.

In addition to her editorial work, Abigail is an accomplished author. Her debut novel, *The Druids' Queen*, is the first book in a planned trilogy, reflecting her passion for fiction and the craft of writing. Drawing on her experience as both an editor and a writer, she is committed to producing engaging, accurate, and accessible content.

The Young Center is excited to welcome Abigail to the team. It looks forward to the expertise and creativity she will bring in advancing the Center's mission to preserve, interpret, and share the history and culture of Anabaptist and Pietist communities.



Twelfth journal issue published

The latest issue of the [Journal of Plain Anabaptist Communities](https://plainanabaptistjournal.org), a peer-reviewed, open



access journal published by the Ohio State University Libraries and co-sponsored by the Young Center, was released recently. This issue examines Plain Anabap-

tist communities through research on Amish demographics, family formation, and public health. Articles explore population trends in the Greater Holmes County Amish settlement, remarriage and blended families, pediatric healthcare among Noah Hoover Old Order Mennonites, and substance use among Amish adolescents. The issue also includes three book reviews on the theological beliefs and church practices of Amish, Hutterites, and Old Order Mennonites.

For access to this and all issues of the journal, visit plainanabaptistjournal.org.

UPCOMING EVENTS

MAKING IT PLAIN: WHY WE NEED ANABAPTISM AND THE BLACK CHURCH

DREW G. I. HART

Tuesday, September 29, 7 p.m.

Bucher Meetinghouse

Mainstream American Christianity is in crisis, largely because it has repeatedly aligned itself with social, political, economic, and cultural domination. In this talk, Rev. Dr. Drew G. I. Hart will explore why salvaging a faithful Christian witness benefits from a convergence of the prophetic stream of the Black Church and the radical discipleship wing of the Anabaptist tradition. By engaging both of these centuries-old traditions, we can move towards becoming a liberative “shalom church” that pursues holistic liberation and peacemaking while embodying the way of Jesus as the church in society.

Hart is an Associate Professor of Theology at Messiah University, where since 2021 he has directed the *Thriving Together: Congregations for Racial Justice* program in central Pennsylvania. Drew is an active member of the Harrisburg First Church of the Brethren and joined the Bethany Theological Seminary Board of Trustees in 2021.

YOUNG CENTER OPEN HOUSE

Saturday, October 10, 1-4 p.m.

Young Center

Join us on the Young Center patio during Elizabethtown College’s Homecoming weekend for popcorn and homemade ice cream churned by Etown’s innovative engineering students! At 2 p.m. in Bucher Meetinghouse, we’ll celebrate the Young Center’s four decades of internationally recognized research, publication, and public programming with words from Carl Desportes Bowman ’79, Rev. Warren Eschbach, and Janice Holsinger ’64.

BROWN BOOK AWARD LECTURE, part 1 Chasing the Hutterers through the Hills: Sources and Translation

EMMY BARTH MAENDEL

JONATHAN SEILING

Thursday, October 29, 3 p.m.

Bucher Meetinghouse

What did Jakob and Katharina look or sound like? What is their story? What were their personalities and leadership styles? After compiling a historical record from 16th-century records, comparing manuscript copies of his letters, sorting through both hagiographic and negative portrayals of Jakob Hutter, and attempting to understand the times he lived in, some questions remain!

Emmy Barth Maendel is the Senior Archivist at Bruderhof Historical Archives and the author of several books, including *An Embassy Besieged: The Story of a Christian Community in Nazi Germany* (2010).

Jonathan Seiling is the Publisher at Gelassenheit Publications and holds a PhD from the University of Toronto.

BROWN BOOK AWARD LECTURE, part 2 Leader in a Turbulent Time: Hutter’s Enduring Legacy

EMMY BARTH MAENDEL

JONATHAN SEILING

Thursday, October 29, 7 p.m.

Bucher Meetinghouse

Jakob Hutter was a compelling leader who had a brief ministry in Tyrol and Moravia. In Tyrol, he served as a missionary, baptizing and arranging secret conferences, while living in constant danger for his life. He was repeatedly summoned to Moravia to arbitrate among various Anabaptist factions until he forged a unified congregation that lives on in the church that bears his name.

SNOWDEN LECTURE

They Moved the School! Amish Education in the 21st Century

MARK W. DEWALT

Tuesday, November 17, 7 p.m.

Bucher Meetinghouse

Mark W. Dewalt will explore three fascinating dimensions of Amish education: the remarkable growth of Amish schools across the United States and Canada, the distinctive teaching styles and educational values that shape student learning, and a behind-the-scenes look at the experiences and everyday moments that make Amish schools distinctive.

Mark Dewalt, a native of nearby Berks County, earned his bachelor’s degree in social sciences from Muhlenberg College and a Ph.D. in Educational Research and Evaluation at the University of Virginia. He is a professor emeritus at Winthrop University.

ADVENT SCRIPTURE AND HYMNS *Singstunde*: An Advent Service of Music and Scripture in the Pietist Tradition

JEFF BACH

RACHEL BUCHER SWANK

Tuesday, December 8, 7 p.m.

Bucher Meetinghouse

Join us for an Advent *Singstunde*—German for “singing hour”—patterned on Pietist devotional practice that combined Scripture and song. The service, anticipating the birth of Jesus Christ, will include texts and prayers in both German and English. Attendees will be invited to sing hymns for which words in both languages will be provided.

The *Singstunde* tradition will be introduced by Jeff Bach, the Young Center’s Director Emeritus, and then led by Bach and Rachel Bucher Swank, music coordinator at Elizabethtown Church of the Brethren.



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Young Center receives rare eighteenth-century devotional book

The Young Center is grateful for the recent gift of a 1717 German edition of *Die Wandlende Seel* (The Wandering Soul) from Carol Brines Kocher of Vermont. A devotional book first published in 1635 by a

Dutch Mennonite named Jan Philipsz Schabaelje, it features a narrator (the “wandering soul”) who converses with Adam, Noah, and Simon Cleopas. These biblical characters encourage the narrator in the pursuit of an upright and moral life.

The book was very popular with both Anabaptist and Pietist readers and was translated into German in the early 1700s.

An inscription in the Young Center’s copy indicates it was owned by a Christian Wolf, apparently an ancestor of Barbara Wolf (1775-1828) who married Jacob Wenger (1778-1858) of Lebanon County, Pennsylvania. The book was passed through generations of Ms. Kocher’s Wenger and Light family forebears.

The 1717 *Wandlende Seel* is now housed in the Earl and Anita Hess Archives, the state-of-the-art facility within Elizabethtown College’s High Library and a leading repository for Anabaptist and Pietist materials.



FALL 2026

YOUNG
CENTER
News

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Young Center News is published twice each year for those interested in the work and events of the Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies. For email notification and a link to each new issue, send a message to youngctr@etown.edu.

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